

Created Unto Good Works

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1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

We read the word of God this far.

Consider with me tonight verse 10,

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Two serious errors regarding the place of good works in the life of the child of God, trouble the member of the church, and the Gospel that the church preaches. Both of those errors are exposed in our text. The first of those errors is the notion that we are saved by our good works, in this case, our own good works are the cause of our salvation; and then we are motivated to perform good works to be the basis of our salvation. It is especially against this error that the apostle is guarding in the text. He has just written in verse 8 that we are saved by grace. He has added in verse 9 "not of works." In our text, he gives the ground, the explanation why it is not true and why it cannot be true that we are saved of or by our own good works for we have been "created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Good works do not precede salvation but they follow salvation. Good works are not the

cause of salvation but they are the result of salvation. It is not true, therefore, and cannot be true that we are saved by our own good works.

As soon as a church confesses that salvation is not by good works, enemies of the Gospel will accuse that church of denying the importance of good works altogether. The Apostle Paul himself faced that charge. When in Romans 3-5 he was teaching that we are justified by faith alone and not at all by our own good works which implies that salvation is not by good works, he entertained the very real possibility that enemies would say that he was teaching, "Let us sin that grace may abound," that is, that good works are entirely unnecessary, or that these enemies would charge that he was abolishing the law of God and good works in obedience to the law of God altogether. But sometimes there is this misunderstanding even among us who confess that we are not saved by our own good works. The thought may come up in our mind and then be expressed in our life that because good works are not the cause of salvation, because our salvation does not depend upon our good works whatsoever, therefore good works are not very important and perhaps good works are unnecessary altogether.

That's the other error concerning the place of good works in the life of the child of God exposed by the word of God in our text. That error is exposed by the very same words that exposed the former error. We have been created unto good works. Good works do not precede salvation but they certainly do follow salvation. Good works are not the cause of our salvation but they certainly are the result, the fruit of our salvation. God himself has created us unto good works. That striking powerful phrase is the word of God to you and me tonight, created unto good works.

Notice with me from the text our creation; second, God's purpose with that creation in our good works; and third, our walk in these good works. Created unto good works: our creation, its purpose in good works, and our walk in these good works.

Creation in the text does not refer to God's great work of making you and me physically whether on the sixth day of creation when he made Adam and Eve, or in the womb of our mother when we were conceived, rather creation refers to God's still greater and grander work of salvation. This is evident from the passage itself of which the text is a part. In the first half of Ephesians 2, the apostle is not treating God's work of making everything, and the human race in particular, physically but he is treating of God's work of salvation. That's evident in the very first verse of chapter 2, "you hath he quickened," or made alive, "who were dead in trespasses and sins."

That the apostle by the word "creation" is referring to God's salvation of us is evident, second in the text, when the apostle says that God performed this work in Christ Jesus. God did not make the heavens and the earth in the beginning in Christ Jesus, he made everything by the word that would become flesh in Jesus Christ in the fullness of time and he made everything for Jesus Christ but he did not make everything in Christ Jesus. The work of salvation, however, is a work that God has done and continues to do in Christ Jesus.

That specific aspect of salvation described in the word "creation" is God's work within you and me by his Spirit. It is his work of making you and me living saints who were by nature dead sinners. It is his work of making us holy who were by nature totally depraved. It is the work of salvation that consists of begetting us again so that we become the children of God spiritually and actually, showing forth God's praises by our behavior.

The apostle has talked about election in chapter 1, that aspect of salvation. He has referred to Christ's redemption of us on the cross, that aspect of salvation also in chapter 1 and he will come back to that in the second part of Ephesians 2. But in our text, he is referring to the work of regeneration and sanctification. That's evident, again, from the passage itself of which the text is a part. Verse 1 sets the theme, "you hath he made alive," by the work of the Holy Spirit within you, "who were dead in trespasses and sins," and that it is this particular aspect of salvation that the apostle describes as creation is plain in the text itself. This work of salvation produces good works, God hath "created us unto good works."

This saving work of the Spirit within us, the apostle describes as creation. He uses the very same word that ordinarily in the Bible refers to God's work of making the heavens and the earth physically in the first six days that we call creation week. In fact, the same word is found here that is used in Genesis 1:1 in the Hebrew, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." When the apostle describes your salvation and mine by this word, the word that brings to mind God's great work of creating all things in the beginning, the apostle is not only teaching but driving home and emphasizing and putting beyond all controversy and any doubt whatsoever that God's salvation of you and of me was the work of God and the work of God alone.

By describing our salvation with this word, "created," the apostle denies that you and I had anything to do with our salvation whatsoever. We didn't cooperate with God in our salvation. We didn't do anything beforehand that made us worthy to be saved. The saving work of God simply did not depend upon anything in us whatsoever. God saved you. Whenever he did that, whether when you were in your mother's womb or a very young child, as an elect child of the covenant which is ordinarily the case, or in the case of some who may be here tonight when you were a grown-up and you were born again and converted in your adult years, makes no difference, God saved you by his own power and because of his own good pleasure for he created you.

Even the little children who are here tonight can understand this and I want you to understand this. I'm going to ask you some questions. They sound like silly questions, that's alright. What did light have to do with its own coming into existence on day 1 of the creation week? And you little children say, "Nothing," and you're right. What did the sun have to do first before God made it on the fourth day of the creation week? And you say, "Nothing," and you're absolutely right. And did Adam and Eve cooperate with God? Did they help God? Did they work with God on the sixth day of creation week when they were made? And you answer, "Of course not. They had nothing to do with that whatsoever." God made those things by his own power. He did it alone, by himself, and he did it because he willed to do it. It was his good pleasure.

If that's true about God's work of saving you and me, this implies that God's salvation of you personally and then of the whole church as well, was a work of great power. That certainly was a work of great power when God called the things that did not exist into existence on the six days of the creation week. What a testimony to the power of God is this vast, splendid, orderly, intricate universe in which we live, but no less expressive of the great power of God is the salvation of you or me, one sinner. Indeed, if we were inclined to make a comparison, we would say more power was exercised by God in saving you and me than was exercised in the creation of the world in the beginning. Then God only had to call the universe out of nothing but what did he have to work with when he saved you and me? He had to bring holiness out of total depravity. He had to bring free sons and daughters of himself out of slaves of Satan. He had to bring spiritual life out of spiritual death.

Your salvation is a wonder. It ought to be a wonder to you, yourself, that you shake your head daily about the power of God exercised in your salvation. And you are a wonder to everybody else, and you are a testimony not only to God's almighty power but to his almighty power of grace. That, too, is a difference between his work of making everything in the beginning physically and his saving of elect sinners. The power that God exercised in your heart and mind was the power of his grace in Christ Jesus. Christ had to die to obtain the right for God to create us as he has done, and then out of that risen Jesus Christ at the right hand of God comes that power, the power of grace that created us the sons and daughters of God.

God performed that work of salvation in each one of us as he does in all of the church in Christ Jesus, the text says. If we had the time tonight, it would be worth our while to examine how many times in chapter 1 and the first half of chapter 2 alone, the apostle repeats "in Christ Jesus." Verses 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13 and more of chapter 1 repeat that phrase. In chapter 2, it occurs in verse 5, verse 6, verse 7, and in our text. All of our salvation from beginning to end is in Christ Jesus or by Christ Jesus. God chose us in eternity in Christ Jesus. God redeemed us by Christ Jesus. Now God has created us by the work of the Spirit in Christ Jesus.

That must have a practical effect upon you and me and that practical effect must be that we become more determined tonight to know Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. That practical effect must be that we cast ourselves more and more upon Christ Jesus, depending upon him for all of our salvation.

In this old, perishing, sin-cursed world, there is one new creature of God and it is the risen Jesus Christ, the man Jesus Christ is the new creature of God. On the basis of his atoning death and by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus has been given and has had worked into him by God a new life, a life never lived before not even by the first Adam, a life that is immortal because it is now above the touch of death. It is of a new quality, an eternal life, a spiritual life, and when God saved you and me, this is what he did: he united us to Jesus Christ so that that new, immortal, eternal, spiritual, heavenly life of

Christ flowed into you and me, so that as the apostle writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Behold, if any man is in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature."

You can never be separated from Jesus Christ. God doesn't go back on his works, and besides that, there's no power on earth that is stronger than the power of that new life of Jesus Christ which you share by being united into him. This is the truth that you will persevere and one day see Jesus Christ face-to-face, and this is the explanation of the great good news not only that we will have victory over death that faces us all, but that in fact we shall never die, we can never die. When our body dies or we die in the body, the power of death cannot touch that immortal life of Jesus Christ that is in us, so that in the soul immediately we are carried up to be with Christ to live, to continue living that new life that we have already begun to live now. Isn't that lovely news, that the death of a loved one who fell asleep in Christ, or as we face our own death, they are in Christ Jesus and are already new creatures in him.

The result is that we have become God's workmanship. We are his workmanship. The apostle carries through that comparison between God's work of making everything physically and God's saving of us. The world that God made, especially when God viewed it at the end of the sixth day and he did, he's a workman and he takes pleasure in his work, when God surveyed that world that he had made at the end of the sixth day, the Triune God looked over that world, a puny little thing in comparison with him but still with its own grandeur, and the Triune God said within himself, "Behold my workmanship, my handiwork, revealing my power, my wisdom, my splendor and my grandeur." And he had pleasure in that work. "The heavens declare the glory of God," Psalm 19:1 says, "and the firmament showeth his handiwork," his workmanship.

We are his workmanship now, the handiwork of the Triune God in Jesus Christ. Tonight the Triune God looks down from heaven upon Faith Protestant Reformed Church, a true church of Jesus Christ as evident from the marks confessing God in Jesus Christ, consecrated to God in love for him, and the Triune God says to himself, "Behold, my workmanship. There is the evidence of the power of my grace, and there is the reflection of my beauty, my splendor." Workmanship refers to splendor and beauty. "Paradise Lost" by Milton shows something of the poetic gift of that poet. A painting by Rembrandt shows something of the skill and artistry of that Dutch painter. A symphony by Mozart reveals the musical ability of that genius. The church of Jesus Christ in the world as the handiwork or workmanship of God shows forth the glories of the great artisan who has created this church, and what holds true for the church as a body, holds true for you personally. The Triune God says about you personally as one who believes on his Son with a true faith and confesses Christ's name and orders your life according to his law, "Behold, my workmanship, the revelation of my power and the manifestation of the beauty of my glory in the world."

As God's workmanship, we are prepared to perform good works and that was the purpose of God when he created us in Christ Jesus, created in Christ Jesus, the apostle proclaims unto good works. Unto good works means that our performance of good works was God's purpose when he saved us. Just as on the fourth day that God created the sun unto shining

means that God had a purpose with making the sun, and the purpose he had was that the sun would shine so that it would illumine and heat the earth to make life possible for his new creations in Jesus Christ, so that God has created us unto good works means that God had a purpose when he saved us and that his purpose was that we perform good works.

The apostle demolishes the notion here of that one error concerning the place of good works in the life of the child of God, that good works are the cause of salvation and that we are saved by our good works for he does not write created because of our good works, or created on the condition of good works, but created unto good works. Our good works do not precede salvation but they follow salvation. They are not the cause of salvation but they are the product of salvation. Every form of the teaching that our salvation in the sense now of our being changed from dead sinners into living saints and our life as living saints, every form of the error that salvation is conditioned by our good works is cut off at the root, created unto good works.

At the same time, the apostles exposes as an error the teaching that those who are unregenerated and unbelieving are also able to perform good works in the sphere of society but good works nevertheless in the sight of God. That's the teaching of the false doctrine of common grace. Common grace teaches that even unregenerated and unbelieving people are able to perform some works that are truly good in the realm of society but what if one must be created by God to perform good works and the unregenerated have not been created unto good works? What if in order to produce good works one must be brought into living union with Jesus Christ himself so that the resurrection life of Jesus Christ flows into him by the Spirit and becomes his? But the reprobate ungodly are not united to Jesus Christ, and what if, in addition, as we see in a moment, in order that we perform good works those good works must be ordained for us beforehand but God has not ordained good works beforehand for those whom he has not chosen in Jesus Christ?

At the same time, the apostle guards against the error of those who suppose that good works are unimportant and perhaps even unnecessary in the life of the child of God. If God's purpose in saving you, God's purpose was that you perform good works, who will say good works are unimportant and even unnecessary? Surely the very purpose of God with the great work of salvation in Jesus Christ is precious to him and must be precious also to us. Don't say, "But I'm unable to perform good works. By nature I'm depraved." If you say that, I respond to you, "You weren't listening. You weren't listening to me as the preacher, and you weren't listening to the apostle." Didn't we hear him say you have been created in union with Christ Jesus so that you are God's workmanship, God's great poem, God's great symphony, God's great painting, God's great living family, God's son, God's daughter? Of course you are able now to perform good works.

Then if someone objects, "But I still have a corrupt nature and that wicked nature defiles every work I do." My response is that's a different story. The apostle doesn't say here that we're able to perform good works perfectly. Every one of our good works is tainted and defiled by sin. That's our sorrow. That's why we must have broken hearts at the end of

every day. That's why we must fly for forgiveness even for our best good works to the cross of Jesus Christ. That's why they are mistaken who are teaching in the Reformed sphere today that the good works that Christians do by the power of grace are partly the basis of righteousness and salvation, and even going so far as to teach Presbyterian and Reformed people to go into the judgment day on the day of their death holding up their own good works as a basis for the verdict that God will utter from the judgment seat on that day. Whoever appears on the judgment day holding up his own good works as the basis for that verdict from the bench, "Not guilty," and the following enter into the kingdom prepared for him must be condemned. Thus works are defiled with sin. It cannot be the basis of salvation, of righteousness. Go into that judgment on the day of your death and on the great day of the final public judgment without any work of yours but only believing, trusting in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ and his perfect work. Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. But God forgives the pollution of our sin that taints our good works so that all that is left in his sight are those good works and those good works are pleasing to him.

Indeed the apostle teaches that we will produce good works. If God has created us unto them, his purpose will be realized in the life of every one of his saved children. Do you think God could have said to the sun on the fourth day of creation, "Sun, shine," and then the sun failed to shine? There is certainty here. Believers and the children of believers will perform good works. That's necessary. That's a certainty. To be united to Christ, to have that life of Christ in you, you must show forth the fruits of that life.

That doesn't imply that exhortations and admonitions are unnecessary. There are some who respond to all this by saying, "Yes, the saved child of God will produce good works but he'll do it automatically. He doesn't need exhortations to tell him what to do. He doesn't need admonitions warning him against sin." And sometimes these people react against preaching in the Protestant Reformed churches too, that instructs the people concerning a godly life, that exhorts them, that admonishes them, that tells them, "You must obey the law of God," by charging that that minister isn't Reformed, he's not truly Protestant Reformed with those exhortations and those admonitions, he's really forsaken the Gospel of grace. So what has to be said to people like that is this, "My, you are quite some spiritual people, you are. You don't need any exhortations. You don't need any admonitions. Evidently you don't have a corrupt nature that bothers you much. The world around you doesn't seduce you very strongly, and the devil has practically given up on you to tempt you to fall away and to disobey. Some spiritual man and woman you are. Why, you're really so spiritual and so holy you don't belong here in the world anymore. You really ought to go to heaven." And I don't believe a word of it. As far as I'm concerned, my corrupt nature tempts me to sin very strongly every day and even though God's grace, I believe, has been working in me for almost 70 years, do you know what? The world out there is sometimes very attractive to me and there are devils that bother me, and I believe that's the normal experience of every child of God until the day of his death.

So we need exhortations and we need admonitions. They don't jeopardize the grace of salvation. They're God's means to carry out in your life and mine his purpose so we

produce good works. And that's really the way it is with creation too. You mustn't think that after God created the sun on the fourth day, that was the end of the relation between God and the sun and from then on, all by itself, every morning the sun comes up in the east and the sun shines, illumines and gives heat. As soon as God had finished creating the sun, God kept speaking to the sun. He speaks to it today his living word of providence, "Sun, come up in the east and go down in the west. Sun, shine. Sun, give light and give heat." He exhorts that sun, maybe even admonishes, "Sun, don't stop shining until the day of the return of Jesus Christ."

That's the way it is with you and me. God created us in Christ Jesus unto good works but if he leaves us on our own, why, then we fall back into damnation and we certainly never produce good works. But he keeps speaking to us and he speaks to us in the word of the Gospel. He speaks to us in the word that assures us that our salvation is by grace and not out of works so that we are moved to thank him and love him. He speaks to us explaining the purpose of his salvation of us so that that purpose will become our purpose as well.

He speaks to us sometimes in the preaching by exhortations and admonitions, and works in us the performance of good works so that we will walk in them, the text says. That implies, if you think about it, that before you ever do your good works, they're there already. If I say to you after the service, "Walk on that sidewalk out there," that means that sidewalk is there and you walk on that sidewalk. The text says we walk in good works, that implies that the good works are there already before we do them, the explanation the apostle gives when he says, "God has ordained those good works for us beforehand."

And the eternal decree of election that he chose us unto salvation, God did something else, he ordained the good works that he wanted us to perform. He decreed these good works in his counsel. They're there in eternity. Then we mustn't think that God ordained a whole treasure chest full of good works so that as we come to live, we walk past that treasure chest of good works and we say, "I think I like that. I'll do that one. I will raise my children in the right way. I like that one. I think I will visit the nursing home and comfort the aged saints." And somebody else says, "I'll take this one." But the thought of the apostle is that in that decree God ordained all the good works for each one of his children individually to perform. There are husbands here loving their wives according to the instruction of Scripture. God ordained that good work eternally for you. There are mothers here who are giving themselves to the rearing of their children at sacrifice and cost. God ordained that good work in eternity for you to perform. We're here tonight worshipping God in spirit and in truth. God ordained that good work for us from eternity. You will speak a good word to a needy brother or sister. God ordained that good work. Some are bearing heavy burdens tonight for Christ's sake. We know some of them suffering great loss because of discipleship of Christ. That's a good work and God ordained that good work for these people in eternity.

Every good work that we perform has a stamp on it, "Made in heaven." We aren't even able to boast about our good works, therefore. We like to do that especially if somebody praises us for it. We think, "My, I'm quite somebody having done that good work." We're

indebted to God for the good works that we perform. It's a privilege to serve him by performing good works. We ought to be thankful for that privilege. That doesn't take away from the fact that we walk in them. Actively, deliberately, energetically, we perform these good works. We do because God works in us but we do, and that pleases God. He's not pleased with machines.

Only the apostle says, we walk in them. That's a little different from doing them. If he had said that we should do these good works, we might go home tonight thinking we do some good works now and then: between 6 and 7:30 on a Sunday night, at our devotions after supper table, when we have a Bible study. Oh no, that's not God's purpose with our salvation but his purpose is good works, that we walk in them. Our whole life, Monday as well as Sunday, playing as well as working, eating and drinking as well as praying and singing, our whole life is a life of thankful love to God. We walk in them in our marriages. We walk in them in our family life. We walk in them when we send our children to the good Protestant Reformed Christian schools. We walk in them at work. We walk in them when we play. And thus it is true already now through these new creatures in Christ Jesus that old things have passed away. Behold, for us, all things have become new. Amen.

Let us pray.

We are thankful, O God, for making us by thy grace living, active, willing manifestations of the power and the beauty of thy grace and glory. Work it in us more and more that by thy grace we may work it out. In Christ's name. Amen.